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Cpl. Charlie Clark Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune

VPP defines job hazards, saves lives



Larry W. Person, steam generator plant technician, demonstrates what Tommy Wilson, a steam generator plant technician, was doing when his accident happened, Nov. 7. Person called 911 and helped Wilson after the accident

What seemed like a normal day for Tommy Wilson at the steam generator plant aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune took a turn for the worse before the day's end.

As he performed maintenance to a boiler, something went wrong. Wilson received severe burns on his body which required skin grafts; fortunately he survived thanks to the personal protective equipment he wore.

"A gasket was sucked into the pipe I was working on and caused a leak," said Wilson. "It happened so fast, I didn't even know what was going on when the steam engulfed me."

Base personnel follow Voluntary Protection Program guidelines, one of which is wearing PPE. The program is a part of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's effort to extend employee protection beyond the minimum required standards.

"Protecting employees is our goal," said Corey B. Myers, a base safety department inspector. "Incidents like that should not occur. When they do, we figure out the problem, fix it and ensure it is inspected and regulated to keep a safe working environment for employees."

Part of VPP is to analyze the work area and spot potential hazards. Accidents, like the one Wilson was involved in, happen when people cut corners and do not follow instructions.

"Whoever worked on that pipe before me must have gotten lazy as he was wrapping up for the day and didn't tighten everything down," Wilson said. "Since my accident, a valve was installed to make sure there is no steam in the area we're working. Even though it was a bad experience, I'm glad no one else got hurt."

OSHA certified safety inspectors, like Myers, routinely visit work areas aboard base to ensure the regulations are being followed, and the workers are not facing more danger than their job requires.

"Some places are inherently dangerous due to the environment people are working in, such as confined spaces, or the equipment used, like saws in the hobby shop," Myers said. "We have systems and procedures in place that will make sure without a doubt the operator is safe, but only if the procedure is followed."

Enforcing the VPP procedures in the work place is paramount to keeping service members and civilians safe.

Larry W. Person, steam generator plant technician, called 911 and assisted Wilson after the accident. For more information about VPP or the Safety Department, visit

www.mcieast.marines.mil/StaffOffices/Safety/VoluntaryProtectionProgram.aspx